

BESSIE BUNTER FORGETS!



HILDA RICHARDS

CHAPTER I

BESSIE forgot.

That was really the beginning of it.

Bessie Bunter's memory, like that of her brother Billy at Greyfriars, was not good. In fact it rather resembled a sieve.

Such things as meal times, and light refreshments in break, Bessie always remembered quite easily. Other, less important, things she forgot even more easily. She was almost a genius at forgetting her lessons.

Miss Bellew, her form-mistress at Cliff House School, was quite patient with Bessie Bunter. But when Bessie, twice bidden to brush her untidy hair, still forgot to do so, Miss Bellew lost patience, and gave her a translation.

An indignant Bessie rolled into No. 4 Study in the Fourth, which she shared with Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn.

"I say, you girls!" squeaked Bessie.

Barbara and Mabel did not immediately heed. Mabel was standing with a tennis racket in her hand, and a slightly impatient expression on her face. Barbara was seated by the window reading. She was reading *Faust*—in German.

Babs was probably the only girl in the Cliff House Fourth who could do it. Still more remarkable, she seemed to like it. She was in fact so deep in Goethe's verse, that she seemed oblivious of the circumstance that Mabel was waiting for her.

"Do come on, Babs," Mabel was saying, as the ample form of Bessie Bunter almost filled the doorway of No. 4.

"Just a minute or two!" said Babs, without looking up.

"Somebody will bag the court if we don't go down—"

"I say, you girls!" squeaked Bessie again.

"Run away and play, Bessie," said Mabs.

"That cat—!" began Bessie.

"Which?" interrupted Mabs, sarcastically. There were few inhabitants of Cliff House School whom Bessie Bunter did not, at one time or another, describe as "cats". Indeed it might sometimes have been inferred from Bessie that Cliff House was an almost wholly feline establishment.

"Bellew!" snapped Bessie.

"Bellew isn't a cat," said Mabs.

"She's given me a translation."

"I expect you asked for it."

"Cat!" said Bessie.

Mabs laughed, and then, disregarding translation and cats, called across the study to Babs again.

"Look here, Babs, come on, and leave that stuffy German tosh alone. You can give Faust and Mephistopheles a rest till after tea."

"Oh, all right," said Babs, and she laid down her book in the window-seat, and rose to her feet.

"I say, Babs, don't you go!" exclaimed Bessie. "I've got a translation from Virgil to do, and I want you to help me."

"Oh, dear!" said Babs.

Barbara Redfern was Miss Bellew's brightest pupil in the Fourth Form at Cliff House. Not only did she read German because she liked it, but Latin, at which the plump Bessie was hopelessly "bottled", seemed to come to her as easily as breathing. That was a circumstance of which Bessie, being in the same study, was accustomed to take full advantage. Babs was good-natured—a little thoughtlessly good-natured, perhaps, at times: and did not like saying "No" even to so persistent a spot of worry as Bessie Bunter. Babs had laid down *Faust* because Mabs wanted her for tennis: now she did not pick up her racket, because Bessie wanted her for Latin!

"Now, look here, Babs, let Bessie get on with it on her own," said Mabel. "Bellew would make no end of a fuss if she knew."

"She won't know," said Bessie. "That's all right."

"It isn't all right!" said Mabs. "It's against the rules, for one thing."

"Bother the rules," said Bessie. "Bellew said I'm to take it in before tea. You go and play tennis while Barbara helps me."

"Come on, Babs," said Mabel, unheeding.

Barbara hesitated.

"Well, Bessie's such a little donkey at Latin," she said. "Perhaps I'd better give her a hand. You ask Marjorie or Clara or Dolly Jobling—"

"Br-r-r-r!" grumbled Mabel: which was more expressive than intelligible. But she walked out of the study with her racket, leaving Babs to Bessie and Latin—neither of which really added to the enjoyment of existence.

Babs and Bessie sat down to Latin. Babs sat at the table with a pen in her hand, and a volume of Virgil open before her at the passage which Bessie had to translate. Bessie sat in the armchair, produced a sticky chunk of toffee from some sticky recess, and proceeded to chew the same. That was Bessie Bunter's idea of being "helped" with a Latin translation. Babs was to do the work while Bessie masticated toffee!

Barbara glanced at her, and frowned.

"You must go through it, Bessie," she said. "Come and sit at the table and work it out with me."

"Well, you get on with it, while I finish this toffee," said Bessie. "It will be O.K. with Bellew—she won't know you did it."

There was a step in the passage which stopped at the open doorway. Babs, supposing that it was Mabel, did not look round: she was beginning on the Latin. But Bessie Bunter blinked at the doorway through the big spectacles that were so like Brother Billy's, and ejaculated:

"Oh!"

"You ought to look at it, at least," Babs was beginning.

"Barbara!" said an unexpected voice.

Then it was Babs' turn to ejaculate "Oh!" and she fairly spun round to the doorway.

A somewhat angular lady stood there, looking in. And the expression on the face of Miss Bellew, the form-mistress of the Cliff House Fourth, was extremely stern and severe. Evidently she had heard Bessie's remark as she stopped at the doorway.

Babs caught her breath.

The two girls rose to their feet: Babs with the pen in her hand, Bessie with the chunk of toffee.

"Barbara!" repeated Miss Bellew, in unusually deep tones.

"Oh! Yes, Miss Bellew!" stammered Barbara.

"I am not wholly surprised at this!" said Miss Bellew, grimly. "I have more than once suspected something of the kind. I came here to ascertain whether Bessie was working on her translation. I find that you are doing the work for her, Barbara, while Bessie is doing nothing."

"I—I—I was helping—!" stammered Babs. "We—we are allowed to help one another, Miss Bellew—"

Miss Bellew dismissed that with a gesture.

"I find you working on the translation, and Bessie eating toffee," she said. "If that is what you call helping one another, Barbara, I do not agree. Bessie, you will translate twenty-four lines instead of twelve."

"Oh, scissors!" moaned Bessie.

"You, Barbara, will be given detention for Wednesday afternoon," said Miss Bellew, "and if this should occur again, I shall report you to the Principal. You are perfectly well aware that one girl is not permitted to do the work of another."

"I—I was only going to help—"

"Do not prevaricate, Barbara."

Barbara Redfern crimsoned.

"Miss Bellew! I tell you—" Her eyes flashed. With all her good nature, Barbara had a temper. "I tell you—"

"Kindly do not take that tone with me, Barbara."

"I tell you—"

"That will do! Take your work to the form-room, Bessie, and do it there." Miss Bellew turned and swept away.

CHAPTER II

"CAT!" said Bessie.

She blinked out of the doorway through her big spectacles, before she thus expressed her feelings. Miss Bellew was gone: and, apparently finding solace in it, Bessie repeated "Cat!"

Barbara stood with flushed cheeks, breathing hard. She was angry: and like the ancient prophet, she felt that she did well to be angry! That word "prevaricate" was altogether too much. It was true that she had intended only to help Bessie with that wretched translation. She did not reflect, for the moment, that that intention had been unlikely to be carried out. Bessie's intention, of landing the translation entirely on her study-mate, was much more likely to have been carried into effect.

"Cat!" repeated Bessie, blinking at Babs. "I say she says I'm to work in the form-room. You can't come there and help me."

"No!" said Barbara.

"Cat! Coming along quietly and spying into the studies! Cat!"

"Spying?" repeated Barbara.

"Well, what do you call it, then?" yapped Bessie. "I'd jolly well like to tell Bellew what I think of a beak coming along and spying! Yah!"

Bessie rolled disconsolately out of the study with Virgil under a fat arm. Somehow or other, Miss Elizabeth Bunter had to struggle through that translation on her own, unassisted, with two dozen instead of one dozen lines to deal with. That was more than sufficient to occupy Bessie's mind, and left her no time to think about Barbara's detention.

Barbara, left alone in the study, was not thinking so much of the detention, unpleasant as it was, as of Miss Bellew's still more unpleasant words. Seldom had she felt so angry and resentful. In that mood, it seemed to her that Bessie was right: wasn't it "spying", to come suddenly on girls in a study who were not expecting anything of the kind?

In a calmer and more amiable mood, Babs would not have taken that view. Now she did take it, and, like Bessie, wished that it had been possible to tell Miss Bellew what she thought of it.

But a Fourth-form girl couldn't do that.

But could she not?

Suddenly Babs burst into a laugh—a rather sharp and sardonic laugh, which was quite unlike her usual self. A line from the *Faust* she had been reading recurred to her mind: recalled by Bessie's use of that disagreeable word "spying". It was a sentence addressed by Faust to Mephistopheles.



"Do not prevaricate," said the form-mistress.

"Das Spionieren, scheint, ist deine Lust". Which, translated into English, was "Spying, it seems, is your delight".

Babs laughed again.

She did not give herself time to reflect. When Babs was angry, it seldom lasted long: but it was quite emphatic while it lasted. At the moment, she was very angry indeed: and she had thought of a way of telling Miss Bellew what she—for the moment at least—thought of her. Couldn't a girl in Miss Bellew's form ask her aid in German? Of course she could. And if the chosen sentence hit home, and hit hard, could Bellew do anything about it? Of course she couldn't.

Babs sat down at the table again, and dipped pen in ink. With a firm hand she wrote:

DEAR MISS BELLEW,

Would you be kind enough to give me the translation of this line from Goethe's *Faust*, "Das Spionieren, scheint, ist deine Lust".

BARBARA.

Babs laughed once more, as she read it over. Bellew would know exactly what it meant, and what it was intended to mean. It was as good as accusing her of spying. Yet it was a perfectly harmless query: it was a genuine line from Goethe: Bellew couldn't do a thing about it. She would have to "take it"; and there was not the slightest doubt that she would be deeply and mortally offended. Just then Barbara rather liked the idea of Miss Bellew being deeply and mortally offended!

She enclosed that precious note in an envelope, and left the study with it. She did not, of course intend to take it personally to Miss Bellew: Barbara had nerve, but not quite nerve enough for that. It was easy to send a note by another hand.

Bessie Bunter, sitting dismally at Latin in the Fourth-form room, blinked round dismally through her big spectacles as the door opened.

She blinked in surprise at Barbara.

"I say, you can't come and help me here!" she squeaked. "Bellew might catch us at it—"

"I want you to take this note to Miss Bellew, when you take in your paper," said Barbara.

"Bother the note, and bother Bellew!" said Bessie. "What's it about?"

"About some German," said Babs, laughing.

"What rot!" said Bessie. "I'll take it if you like." She took the note, and crammed it into a sticky pocket of her tunic. "All right! I say, you get out, or that cat may come spying again."

Barbara got out.

She joined the other girls at the tennis courts, satisfied that she had given Miss Bellew a Roland for an Oliver. And fresh air and healthy exercise soon had the effect of banishing every trace of irate temper.

CHAPTER III

"BABS!"
"Well?"

"What's up?"

Mabel Lynn asked that question rather anxiously in No. 4 study.

They had come in late for tea, after tennis. Being healthy girls with healthy appetites, they were generally ready for tea at tea-time: and having stayed late to finish a set, one of them at least was readier than usual, when at length they did come to No. 4 study. But Barbara did not seem interested in tea.

She was in a very chastened mood now. Bad temper and resentment had vanished, in the fresh air.

Crumbs and unwashed crocks and a general air of untidiness about the study table indicated that Bessie Bunter had been in to tea, and gone. Babs and Mabs being late, Bessie was not likely to wait for them. A meal was a serious matter with Miss Elizabeth Bunter. No doubt she had been more than ready for tea, by the time she had finished that Latin translation and taken it in to Miss Bellew.

Her absence from No. 4 was certainly not the cause of Barbara's restless air of worry. The loss of Bessie's society was something that both Babs and Mabs could bear with great equanimity.

But Barbara, evidently, was worried about something. She moved restlessly about the study. Coming across Goethe, she hurled that German masterpiece into a corner of the room, as if it annoyed her somehow. Her smooth forehead puckered in frowns.

Mabel eyed her. Babs did not answer her question. All she said was:
"That little fat idiot!"

"Bessie?" asked Mabs, no doubt recognizing the description.

"Bother her!" said Babs. "If she hadn't said that Bellew came up spying, I should never have thought of it."

Mabel jumped.

"Bellew!" she exclaimed. "Bellew wouldn't! What did the little donkey mean?"

"Well, she came up to the study while I was helping Bessie with her Latin—"

"Oh!" said Mabel. "Do you mean that she came up, and caught you doing that lazy little minx's work for her?"

Barbara made a grimace.

"I suppose it amounted to that!" she admitted. "Still, she shouldn't have said I was prevaricating—I—I was only explaining that I was going to help Bessie, as we're allowed to do—"

"Um!" said Mabel.

Barbara flushed.

"Oh, I know!" she said. "Anyhow, it made me wild, and then that little idiot said that Bellew came up spying—"

"She ought to have her ears boxed," said Mabel. "Bellew wouldn't dream of doing anything of the kind."

"I know she wouldn't. But—"

"But what?"

"I—I—I—I!" Barbara stammered. "I—I've told her—or as good as told her—that—that—that she was spying—"

"Barbara!"

Mabs forgot all about tea now. She gazed at Babs in horror. Barbara's face was crimson.

"Well, I was stuffy," she said. "I—I—I thought I'd give her a Roland for an Oliver. Of course I didn't say it out plain. I—I sent her a note by another girl, asking her if she'd be kind enough to translate a verse of Goethe's *Faust* for me. Bessie took it in, when she went."

"Well, there's no harm in that," said Mabel. "What do you mean—?"

"The verse was 'Das Spionieren, scheints, ist deine Lust'!" mumbled Barbara.

"What does that mean?"

"It means, 'spying seems to be your pleasure'."

"Oh!" gasped Mabel.

"Of course, she can't do anything!" said Barbara. "It's just a line from *Faust*, but—but—but she'll know—"

"She will know what you meant by it, and it will hurt her a lot," said Mabel, quietly. "Didn't you know it would?"

"I didn't care!" said Babs, remorsefully. "I mean, I didn't then! I—I do now."

"Bellew will be down on you, after this!"

"I don't care about that! I—I jolly well deserve it!" mumbled Barbara, miserably. "I—I shouldn't have done it, Mabs. I shouldn't have, only I was in a beastly temper. It—it can't be helped now—it's too late—"

Mabel was silent: and Babs moved restlessly about the study again. Since she had reflected on that hidden taunt to her form-mistress, Babs had realized more and more how recklessly rash she had been: and, worse than that, how disrespectful and unfeeling.

Miss Bellew could take no official notice of it. But certainly she would resent it very deeply, and with a lasting resentment. Barbara, her brightest pupil, was generally in her good graces. That would be over now. In the form-room she could only expect cold looks and the sharpest edge of Bellew's tongue. But that did not trouble poor Babs so much as the knowledge that she had done an unjust and cruel thing, in the heat of temper: and she would have given worlds to recall it. But as she said to Mabel, it was too late. Bessie Bunter had taken her translation to Miss Bellew—with that wretched note to deliver along with it.

Mabel broke a long silence.

"After all, Bellew mayn't guess what you meant—!" she suggested.

Barbara shook her head.

"She's no fool!" she said. "She must have spotted it the minute she read my note. It's practically accusing her of spying in the studies, and—and she isn't really that sort at all. I—I—I feel horribly ashamed of it, Mabs. I was a cat!"

"She can't do anything about it!" said Mabs.

"I know! She couldn't admit that she saw what I meant by it! Wouldn't they snigger in the Staff Room, if it came out! But—but that only makes it all the worse," said Babs, wretchedly. "I wish I hadn't done it."

Mabel made no rejoinder to that. Only too often had hasty-tempered Barbara acted in haste and repented at leisure.

"She won't say a word!" said Babs. "But—but—she will never forget it! She couldn't forgive a thing like that! Oh, dear."

"It's rotten!" said Mabel.

"Putrid!" sighed Barbara.

Marjorie Hazeldene looked in at the study doorway.

"Barbara here?" she asked. "Miss Bellew wants to see you in her study, Babs."

Marjorie passed on, leaving Babs and Mabs looking at one another. Babs drew a deep, deep breath.

"I—I wonder—!" she mumbled. "I—I—I'd better go."

And she went.

It was with a sinking heart that Barbara presented herself in Miss Bellew's study. She fully expected to be greeted by an icy stare: Bellew in her grimmest mood. To her surprise, Miss Bellew was looking serious, but nothing more. She gave the bewildered Babs quite a kindly glance.

"Marjorie said you wished to speak to me, Miss Bellew," breathed Babs.

"Yes, Barbara! I wish to tell you that I regret having used the word 'prevaricate' when I spoke to you in your study," said Miss Bellew. "I know, of course, that while what you stated was not in strict accordance with the facts, you had no intention of prevaricating, and I regret very much that I used the word."

"Oh!" gasped Barbara.

"That is all, Barbara! You may go."

Barbara almost tottered from the study. Miss Bellew, evidently, had realized that she had spoken too severely in No. 4, and was anxious to set the matter right. That only added a keener edge to poor Babs' remorse. It was this kind and considerate form-mistress to whom she had despatched that note with its wretched, unjust taunt.

But what did it mean? Had Bellew failed to see the hidden meaning of that note? That was impossible—she would have seen it at a glance. She could not have read the note yet. That must be it. She must have received it long ago,

but so far she had not read it. That was the only explanation Babs could think of, as she went back wearily to No. 4—the most miserable girl in Cliff House School.

CHAPTER IV

“I SAY, you girls!”
“Oh, go away!”
“Be quiet!”

Bessie Bunter rolled into No. 4 study, and bestowed a devastating blink through her big spectacles on Babs and Mabs. Bessie was indignant. This really was not the sort of greeting that a girl expected in her own study!

“What’s the matter?” she demanded.

“You!” snapped Babs.

“Oh, really, Barbara—!”

“Don’t bother!” said Mabs.

“Oh, really, Mabel—”

“For goodness sake, don’t natter!” exclaimed Babs and Mabs together: which only increased and intensified Bessie Bunter’s just indignation.

But really, Babs and Mabs were in no mood for Bessie’s “nattering”. Both were deeply worried and troubled: Babs, on account of what she had so hastily done and so sincerely repented: Mabs on account of her friend.

There was nothing that they could do. Miss Bellew, it appeared, could not yet have read that wretched note: but that cut no ice: she would certainly read it, and that would be that! Probably by this time she had read it. Miss Bellew was an efficient lady, not at all likely to leave a note about unread for long. Indeed it was rather surprising that she had not read it on delivery. Still, she couldn’t have, or she would hardly have spoken so kindly to Barbara afterwards.

She was not likely ever to speak kindly to her again! All the more because she could not very well take any official note of it, that taunt would sink deep, and never be forgotten. And really she was very kind and good, and really Barbara liked her: and—except in a very hasty and disgruntled moment—wouldn’t have hurt her for worlds. It was disastrous all round.

“Well, you two look jolly, and no mistake!” said Bessie Bunter, blinking at them. “Anybody would think that cat had given you a translation to do, not me. I say, she jawed me when I took it in. She said it was the worst translation she had ever seen.”

“Probably it was!” snapped Barbara.

“Well, you could have helped me, if she hadn’t nosed into the study,” said Bessie. “I’d like to tell her what I think of her nosing in—”

“Oh, dry up, for goodness sake.”

“Cat!” said Bessie. “I tell you she jawed me, and I was afraid she was

going to tell me to do it over again. I can tell you I was jolly glad to get out of her study. I say, I've just been in old Janet's tuck-shop—"

"Go there again!" suggested Mabel.

"I say, she's got in a new lot of cream puffs!" said Bessie. "I'd have brought a whole bag of them up to the study, and treated you two, only—"

"Only old Janet would have wanted to be paid for them!" hooted Mabel.

"Well, she's mean," agreed Bessie. "Mean as they make 'em. I say, you girls, can you lend me half-a-crown between you?"

The reason why Bessie had come up to the study was revealed. But Babs and Mabs were not in the mood in which Bessie had hoped to find them. So far from desiring to produce half-a-crown for the fattest member of the Cliff House Fourth to expend on cream puffs, they were much more inclined to take her by her plump shoulders, and shake her, as the cause of all the trouble.

Bessie blinked from one to the other, and then from the other to the one. Two frowning faces met her blinks.

"No!" said Babs.

"No!" said Mabs.

"I say, is anything the matter?" asked Bessie. It dawned on her fat mind that there was trouble in the air in No. 4 study.

"Oh, take your face away!" said Barbara.

"What are you stuffy about?" demanded Bessie, warmly. "Have I done anything, I'd like to know? Oh!" Bessie broke off. "If you're stuffy about my forgetting that note you asked me to take to Miss Bellew—"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"I didn't mean to forget it. But I told you she jawed me about my translation, and that put it out of my head. "A sticky hand groped in a sticky pocket of a sticky tunic. "Look here, if that's what you're waxy about, Barbara, I'll go down now and take it to Bellew—"

Barbara stared at her, as if petrified. Mabel uttered almost a yell.

"Bessie! You little chump! Didn't you take Barbara's note to Miss Bellew at all?"

"I forgot it—"

"You—you—you forgot it!" articulated Barbara.

"Well, she was jawing me, you know," said Bessie, defensively. "I—I never thought of it till I was feeling in my pocket to see if there was any money there, in the tuck-shop, and—and—"

The sticky hand came out of the sticky pocket with a sticky note in it. Barbara could hardly dare to trust her eyes. It was the note she had handed Bessie in the form-room to take to Miss Bellew! Bessie had slipped it into that pocket. Apparently it had remained there ever since!

"It's all right," said Bessie. "I suppose it wasn't very important, was it,

for Bellew to get it at once? I'll take it to her now, if you like, if you're going to be stuffy about it. Look here, if I take it down to Bellew now, will you lend me half-a-crown till Saturday?"

Bessie made a move towards the door.

Barbara fairly bounded from her chair. That sticky note was clutched from a sticky hand in a twinkling.

"That's it, Babs?" gasped Mabel.

"That's it, Mabs!" gasped Barbara.

"Oh, what a spot of luck!"

"You're telling me!"

"I say, you girls, what on earth do you mean?" exclaimed the mystified Bessie. "What are you tearing up that note for, Barbara? I tell you I'll go down to Bellew at once if you like—"

"If I like!" Barbara chuckled. "I don't like, thanks! You forgetful little goose, thank goodness you've got a memory like a sieve! Bellew never had my note at all, Mabs—"

"And she won't now," chuckled Mabs, as Barbara scattered a handful of tiny fragments over the study.

"Bessie, you little donkey—"

"Bessie, you little fat goose—"

"Did you say half-a-crown?" Barbara picked up her handbag. "Here you are, Bessie! Now roll off and scoff those cream puffs!"

Bessie Bunter blinked at Babs. She blinked at Mabs. She blinked at a half-crown in her sticky palm. What it all meant was a mystery to Bessie. Why Barbara, instead of being "stuffy" about the non-delivery of that note, was delighted to find that it had never been delivered: even to the extent of lending Bessie a half-crown which it was absolutely certain that Bessie would forget to return, was a puzzle beyond the comprehension of Bessie Bunter's fat wits. But there, at all events, was the half-crown: and that, after all, was all that really mattered! It meant cream-puffs: and Bessie Bunter rolled out of No. 4 study, with the coin clutched in a sticky paw, content to leave the mystery unsolved, so long as she lost no time in getting to the cream-puffs.

"Oh, Babs!" said Mabel.

"Oh, Mabs!" said Barbara.

"Thank goodness that little duffer forgot—!"

"Thank goodness she did!"

All was calm and bright, in No. 4 study. Bessie Bunter rolled away, leaving two happily-relieved schoolgirls looking merry and bright—as merry and bright as Bessie looked when she arrived at the cream-puffs.

THE END